

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE C-8

WASHINGTON POST  
3 July 1984

## JACK ANDERSON

# War Game Gives A New Look at Soviet Missiles

What President Reagan dismissed in early April as "regular and routine maneuvers" by the Soviets turned out to have been a massive, unprecedented exercise that included the launching of six nuclear missiles toward the United States. They were presumably unarmed.

Published reports described the great number of Soviet warships that left seaports for war games in the North Atlantic. Secret Pentagon tallies showed just how huge the flotilla was: at least 135 surface ships and 70 submarines, including nuclear-missile subs in their largest deployment ever.

Now my associate Dale Van Atta has learned from intelligence sources and highly classified reports that the exercise was more ominous than even the numbers suggest. One source said it appeared to be part of a combined conventional-nuclear war plan.

For one thing, the CIA discovered that an entire Soviet city was evacuated during the exercise, in a test of civil defense measures that would accompany a nuclear strike.

Even more significantly, the exercise supported the Pentagon's suspicion that the Soviets' supposedly intermediate-range SS20 missiles may now have to be counted as intercontinental missiles capable of hitting targets in the United States. It was the SS20's massive deployment in eastern Europe that prompted the decision to arm NATO with new U.S. Euro-missiles.

The Defense Intelligence Agency had spotted something peculiar—and alarming—about some of the mobile SS20s located in the northern Soviet Union early in 1981: The launchers appeared to be aimed at the United States, not western Europe.

The CIA pointed out that the SS20's range was believed to be 5,000 kilometers maximum (about 3,100 miles), not great enough to reach important U.S. targets. The CIA suggested the missiles might be designed to "roll over" after launching and head toward Europe. This argument won the day.

But after April's large-scale Soviet war game, the CIA is now conceding that the SS20 may have to be counted as an ICBM. What changed the agency's mind was that the Soviets launched six of the missiles from the western town of Yurya on a northern trajectory, that is, on the polar route toward the United States.

The missiles, presumably armed

with only dummy warheads, were destroyed after they reached outer space. But the very fact of their launching demonstrates that hundreds more nuclear missiles may be aimed at the U.S. mainland than had previously been thought.

Here's why: Top-secret estimates put the number of mobile SS20 launchers at more than 400. Each launcher is believed to have five missiles, and each SS20 carries three independently targeted warheads capable of a half-megaton nuclear blast. That means a total of more than 6,000 warheads.

The SS20's efficiency is frightening. The Defense Intelligence Agency estimates that the missile's warheads can hit within 285 meters (about 314 yards) of their targets more than half the time, and that its launch reliability is 95 percent, its in-flight reliability 97 percent, and its warhead reliability 97 percent. The weapon system's overall reliability is 89 percent.

Even those who still question whether the two-stage SS20 could be an intercontinental missile must concede that its three-stage version, the SS16, is a tested ICBM. And top-secret reports point out that the Soviets have more than 400 SS16s that can be loaded onto SS20 launchers. In fact, they estimate that the Soviets have three operational SS16 regiments, with 12 launchers each, at Plesetsk right now.